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Special Issue "Understanding Others": Editorial

# Understanding others: The neurobiology of social cognition

*Philipp Kanske* [a,b,*] *and Ryan J. Murray* [c]

[a] *Clinical Psychology and Behavioral Neuroscience, Faculty of Psychology, Technische Universität Dresden, Germany*
[b] *Max Planck Institute for Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences, Leipzig, Germany*
[c] *Department of Psychiatry, Faculty of Medicine, University of Geneva, Switzerland*

Social interaction and cooperation constitute key ingredients of human accomplishments, from raising a child in a family to developing democratic societies and even coordinating interplanetary spaceflight. Interpersonal actions thus bear significant consequences at both micro- and macro-levels of societal functioning (Tomasello & Vaish, 2013). Such complex social behavior requires dynamic, flexible and yet controlled processes that represent others' overt behavior as well as their internal, mental states, including the motives, desires and beliefs that drive their actions (Frith & Frith, 2007).

What are the critical functions that enable social behavior? The literature has for some time converged on the idea of an interplay of both cognitive and affective mechanisms that range from early face and voice processing, person and action perception to sharing others' emotions and building cognitive models of others' internal states (Happé, Cook, & Bird, 2017; Kanske, 2018). Significant progress has also been made regarding the neural underpinnings of these processes (e.g., Stanley & Adolphs, 2013, Murray, Schaer, & Debbane, 2012; 2015).

Amassing the most recent advances in social neuroscience research comprises the principal goal of the *Cortex* special issue "Understanding Others". The investigative approaches targeting social cognition are multifaceted and focus on a large range of more or less socially interactive paradigms. They exploit different neuroimaging tools and investigate changes in social affect and cognition across the lifespan as well as within stable interindividual differences. These approaches can equally offer unique insight into specific features of social cognitive and affective functioning by investigating altered processing in neurological and/or mental disorders and can ultimately link social cognition directly to behavioral outcomes, such as pro- or antisocial behavior (Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006; Buchanan & Preston, 2016; Krach, Paulus, Bodden, & Kircher, 2010; Lehmann, Maliske, Böckler, & Kanske, 2019; Schilbach et al., 2013; Stietz, Jauk, Krach, & Kanske, 2019). This special issue thus aims to reflect this broadness and will include original work from various populations, employing different methodological approaches. It will also include meta-analytical and qualitative integrations of the current state of the field, thereby deriving working models of how social cognitive functions facilitate adaptive social interaction.

With the first articles of the special issue now in press, we look forward to disseminating the most recent developments in the field over the coming months, with subsequent articles being integrated in the virtual special issue. We are also looking forward to discussing all contributions to the special issue in a following post-hoc editorial. We esteem this special issue to offer an important contribution to the quickly growing literature that exploits the latest advances in neuroscientific techniques in its aim to gain deeper insights into how we can so adeptly arrive, yet so often gloriously fail, at understanding others.

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* *Corresponding author.*
E-mail address: philipp.kanske@tu-dresden.de (P. Kanske).
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